

Aging U.S. Reds court radical youths

By NATHAN MILLER

WHILE the eyes of the nation are fixed on the antics of the New Left, the aging dowager of American radicalism will begin to celebrate its jubilee year this week, with its first national convention since 1966.

About 200 of the top leaders of the Moscow-line Communist Party, U.S.A. will gather behind closed doors in a New York hotel from Wednesday to Sunday to put a rubber stamp on the leadership's choice of new officers and to discuss strategy.

On the surface, the party, formed September 1, 1919 in Chicago, is approaching middle age in comfort. But deep inside there is a gnawing uneasiness.

Publicly, from Gus Hall, the general secretary since 1957 and the party's real boss, on down, the party's officials are all smiles. Membership is up to 13,000 and rising. The party has been revived since the days when Russian obstreperousness and federal prosecutions reduced the faithful to a hard core of about 10,000 members.

Attracting the young people

It is the beneficiary of an incessant war conducted at home and abroad by anti-Communists against American participation in the Vietnam war and the expansive aspects of the nation's foreign policy.

Party officials say that most of the new members are young people, radicalized by the student revolt sweeping the country.

The party desperately wants to attract young people. When a bright, energetic youngster enters the party, he is quickly given responsibility and an impressive title, then he is pushed out in front, in hopes of attracting more young people.

For the first time in 28 years, the American Communist party fielded a presidential candidate in the 1968 election. While Mrs. Charlene Williams, a Negro, was on the ballot in only four states where she got 1,075 votes, her appearance brightened the party's image as a legitimate arm of dissent.

Mr. Miller is a member of The Sun's Washington Bureau.

And last July, aided by some rich bequests, the party again launched a daily newspaper, called the *Daily World*. Since the demise of the *Daily Worker* 10 years ago, the party had lacked a daily organ.

With only 13,000 members, the party would seem to be hardly worth considering as a serious threat. Mr. Hall, however, has said that for every Communist there are 10 "state-minded Communists."

A "special convention"

The party's upcoming convention, its 19th, was to have been held last year, but rumblings of discontent were so strong, particularly on the West Coast, that the leaders were afraid to call a regular convention.

The leaders feared a possible upheaval and drastic change in leadership because of rank-and-file disaffection with the party's decision to support Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and the alibis for Russian support of the Arabs against Israel.

So they resorted to a "special convention," with about 100 members attending, that did everything a regular convention could do except elect officials. The decision to go ahead with this week's meeting is a clear sign that the old rulers are confident that they have everything in line, according to observers.

Most prominent among the dissidents are Dorothy Healey, the party leader in southern California, and Gil Green, the New York party chief, who was head of the Young Communist League in the 1930's.

Miss Healey's basic theme is that the party makes a serious mistake by being so openly subservient to Moscow. She is seeking a public condemnation of such things as Soviet anti-Semitism and the lack of democracy in Eastern Europe.

Outstanding contributions

The West Coast leader took her criticism to the meeting held last year in New York and was joined by six other national committee members in voting against a resolution supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The Kremlin has made it clear that it wants Mr. Hall kept in power, officially acclaiming him "for outstanding contributions to proletarian internationalism and devotion to Marxism-Leninism."

While the powerful French and Italian Communist parties bitterly denounced the Czech invasion, Mr. Hall was saying: "We are for freedom. But we are not for the freedom of those who endanger socialism."

In preparation for dealing with any possible dissension at the convention, the general secretary is seeking to amend the party constitution by tightening up the section dealing with "democratic centralism." While the stated purpose of the revision is to "bring about more unity," the real aim is to make it more difficult for members to question policy.

Efforts will also be made to step up activities in the fields of youth, Negroes and labor. George A. Myers, who once described himself as leader of the Com-

munist party of Maryland, is reportedly in charge of the labor program.

The party line on the Negro, which has been altered several times in the past, is also showing signs of revision once again. Originally, the party favored the idea of a separate black state in the South. When the integration movement gained strength, the idea was dropped.

Now that some black power militants have taken up the concept of a "black republic," some party leaders are urging another switch, back to the original line of "black self-determination." By this, they hope to link the party with the most militant Negroes.

The question of Communist influence among the nation's youth is probably the most debated issue within the party. Some leaders have advised the dissolution of the party's own youth front, the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America. Instead, they advocate sending members off to join the small group of Communists who have already infiltrated the Students for Democratic Society.

It is argued that the Maoist-line Progressive Labor party has gained influence within SDS since it dissolved its youth front. In fact, there have been recent reports that members of the Progressive Labor party are making a strong bid to take over the radical student group.

Paradox of SDS

Paradoxically, it is the students' "unstructured" organization and ideals so vehemently condemned by their elders that make up the best defense the young radicals have had against Communist infiltration.

Although they are committed to destruction of the "corrupt Capitalist system," as are the Communists, and although they have adopted a Marxist view of the world, the students are suspicious and contemptuous of the Communists because of their reliance on a tight organization and comparative moderation.

"Some people say the Communists have infiltrated the SDS," says one student, "but have you ever considered that the kids may be infiltrating the Communist party."